

**CITY OF ROCKVILLE PLANNING DIVISION
STAFF REPORT**

April 29, 2002

SUBJECT: Map Amendment No. MAP2001-00070 – Woodlawn Hotel/ Chestnut Lodge Property

To change the zoning of the undesignated portion of the original five (5) acres of land known as the Woodlawn Hotel lot at 500 West Montgomery Avenue from R-S to R-S HD (Historic District) and place it in the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District.

Location: 500 West Montgomery Avenue

Description: Remaining undesignated land of original five-acre Woodlawn Hotel lot at 500 W. Montgomery Avenue.

Size: 3.57 acres, more or less, as an addition to the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District.

Planning Commission Public Hearing Date: May 8, 2002

Mayor and Council Public Hearing Date: May 20, 2002

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission concur that the property is eligible for historic designation and find that such zoning will not present an adverse impact to the planning area or neighborhood.

BACKGROUND:

In 1886, Charles Willson purchased five acres of land from the estate of Rebecca Veirs and in 1887, Willson purchased another lot of land from John Mulfinger for a total of five acres of land along West Montgomery Avenue. Willson went bankrupt and the five acres and uncompleted four story brick building was sold in 1889 for \$6,000 to Mary Colley and Charles T. Bell. Mrs. Colley purchased lots 5,6,7, and 8 of the adjacent Rebecca Veirs Addition to make an 8-acre parcel. The Woodlawn Hotel was completed and operated from 1890 to 1908. In 1908, the eight-acre property was offered for sale and purchased by Dr. Bullard for use as mental health facility and renamed Chestnut Lodge. In April of 1974, all of the 8-acre Chestnut Lodge property was included within the boundaries of City of Rockville's West Montgomery Avenue Historic District. These boundaries were submitted at the same time for National Register of Historic Places recognition and certification and the district was subsequently accepted and listed on May 29, 1975. Meanwhile, in response to the Bullard family and other owners, in December of 1974, the Mayor and Council redrew the boundary lines of the historic district as part of the comprehensive rezoning associated with the Master Plan. The Mayor and Council left the recorded Veirs Addition lots along the west side of Thomas Street and the first 200 feet of the 5 acre hotel lot along W. Montgomery Avenue in the

district, and removed the remainder of the original 5-acre hotel lot. In 1995, the property owned by the Bullard Family and Chestnut Lodge was put up for sale. It was eventually sold as two large parcels. The rear portion fronting on Great Falls Road was sold for single-family residential development and the front 20-plus acre campus was sold to Community Psychiatric Clinics (CPC Health) to continue its use as a mental health provider. The Chestnut Lodge facility closed when CPC Health filed for Chapter 11 protection and the property and buildings were purchased by the Washington-Waldorf School. The expected future use of the property is as a private educational institution. The Mayor and Council has recommended that the property be limited to R-S densities if developed as residential.

Planning Area Description

The 5-acre Woodlawn Hotel Lot at 500 West Montgomery Avenue is located in Planning Area Four, West End and Woodley Gardens East-West neighborhoods. Planning Area Four is a mix of single-family residential, garden apartments, townhouses, and senior citizen housing. The Washington-Waldorf School property is one of the last remaining large parcels in the center of Rockville that is zoned R-S (residential suburban) and used for low-density institutional use in a campus format.

The Planning Commission Approved Draft Master Plan (January 2002) addresses the Chestnut Lodge property in Chapter 11 and Chapter 2:

“Chestnut Lodge, 500 West Montgomery Avenue (Chapter 11, pages 21-22)

This property is unique in the City of Rockville because its historical uses are different than that of the surrounding residential neighborhoods. In addition, the administration building at the facility is one of the few remaining examples of the French-Second Empire architectural styles in Rockville and dates back to 1887. The site's bucolic setting is consistent with its original use as a resort hotel and that of a turn-of-the-century mental health institution. Reuse of the facility as a private school or other institution would need not only to be compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhoods and the historic district but also to be compatible with and maintain an architecturally and historically significant structure. In addition, the grounds contain mature plantings that should be preserved.”

Critical Parcel/Area #1 (Chapter 2- pages 12-14)

Chestnut Lodge, 500 West Montgomery Avenue

“Two southern portions of the property were sold and subdivided for single family housing for the Rose Hill and Rose Hill Falls subdivisions. However, the historically significant Woodlawn Hotel/Chestnut Lodge and numerous other buildings remain on the 20.4-acre site. There is also a significant stand of mature trees and a small wetland on the site. Along West Montgomery Avenue, the first 200 feet of the property is within the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District. The site is zoned RS (20,000 sq. ft. minimum lot size). The preservation of the historic buildings and the site's mature trees and limiting traffic impacts are key concerns.”

“There are a variety of development options for the property. The following discusses the major options that have been evaluated. The Plan's recommendations are contained in the paragraph following the bullets.

- Maintain the current institutional use under the RS zone. Although this may be the preferred use, it may not be possible if CPC is forced to sell the property.

- Utilize the current buildings in an institutional use such as a school under the RS zone. A boarding school would have the least traffic impacts; a day school may have increased traffic implications at typical drop off/pick up times. In addition, most schools tend to have playing fields that could endanger the trees.
- A hotel or spa use. This would be an alternative use to save the Main Lodge Building and the property's mature trees. Adequate buffering would need to be provided. A text amendment would be necessary to allow the use in an RS zone.
- Adult living facility. This would be allowed as a Special Exception under the current RS zone. The Main Lodge Building could be utilized as a nursing home facility and some of the existing (non-historic) buildings could be rehabilitated into multi family or condominium or townhouse housing or demolished.
- Single family housing under the provisions of the RS zone (20,000 sq. ft.). Saving the trees would be more difficult under this use.
- Development under one of these Special Development Procedures: 1) variable lot size development; 2) cluster development; or 3) planned residential unit development. Both the variable lot size development and the cluster development would require lots of 15,000 sq. ft. However, there is some flexibility in design standards. Use of the Main Lodge Building as a nursing home or housing for the elderly or other institutional use may be possible. The planned residential unit development has the most flexibility of options and would allow multi-family units as well as attached and semidetached one family dwelling units. However, a text amendment may be necessary depending upon the proposed use for the Main Lodge Building.
- Development using the Comprehensive Planned Development process with additional restrictions placed on the overall density and use of the site."

"Recommendation

This plan recommends that the site be maintained in an institutional use and retain its RS zone in order to offer as much protection as possible for the site's historic buildings and mature trees. A residential use on the property may also be acceptable if the historic buildings and trees are protected. Development under the planned residential unit development procedure is preferred for its flexibility in site design. However, this plan recommends against allowing C-1 uses that are normally permitted in a planned residential unit development. Finally, a hotel/spa use in the Main Lodge Building may be an acceptable use as long as it is limited primarily to the existing buildings, without major additions, and is buffered from the adjacent neighborhoods, and protects the site's historic buildings and trees. This would require either a text amendment or the creation of a new zone to provide for this option."

Planning Process

The property was nominated for historic district status by the Historic District Commission, which hired a consultant through the RFP procedure to assemble the history and archeological basis of the entire Bullard property. The study included Rose Hill Farm and Woodlawn/Chestnut Lodge. The consultant, Ward Bucher, recommended limited historic designation for both properties.

The Historic District Commission held public hearings on the nominations on April 15, 1997 and May 12, 1997. On June 17, 1997, the HDC found that Rose Hill Farm /the Bullard House and its viewscape was eligible for historic designation and Hill Top House ("The Maples") was not eligible due to loss of architectural integrity. Chestnut Lodge was deferred to July 15, 1997, when the remaining portion of the original 5-acre Woodlawn Hotel lot, in addition to the Rose Hill

Farm/Bullard House and Rose Hill Barn were found eligible for historic designation. The remainder of the rear portion of Chestnut Lodge was found not to be eligible. The Mayor and Council decided not to file for historic district rezoning until the property owner, CPC Health, completed its master plan for the parcel. The medical use failed financially and the master plan was never completed. The property was sold in 2001 to the Washington Waldorf School.

The Mayor and Council directed staff to file a comprehensive Map Amendment for the rezoning on their behalf on January 22, 2001. The public hearing on MAP2001-00070 was not held in 2001 at the request of the new owner, Washington-Waldorf School. At the same time, the HDC was asked by the Mayor and Council to identify the elements of highest significance on the site. The HDC listed the original Woodlawn Hotel/ Chestnut Lodge building and Dr. Frieda Fromm-Reichmann's House as structures of primary significance. The treed environmental setting was also considered of primary significance. The laundry, the ice house, the Bullard house, and the stable were found to have secondary significance. No other structures were considered significant.

The Planning Commission is requested to review the information and recommendations of the Historic District Commission and make a recommendation to the Mayor and Council. The Planning Commission review is not limited to historical, cultural, archeological, or architectural significance, but can encompass other planning criteria. The basic underlying zone and permitted uses of the property will not change. The Washington Waldorf School is preparing an overall plan for the property.

Staff Comments

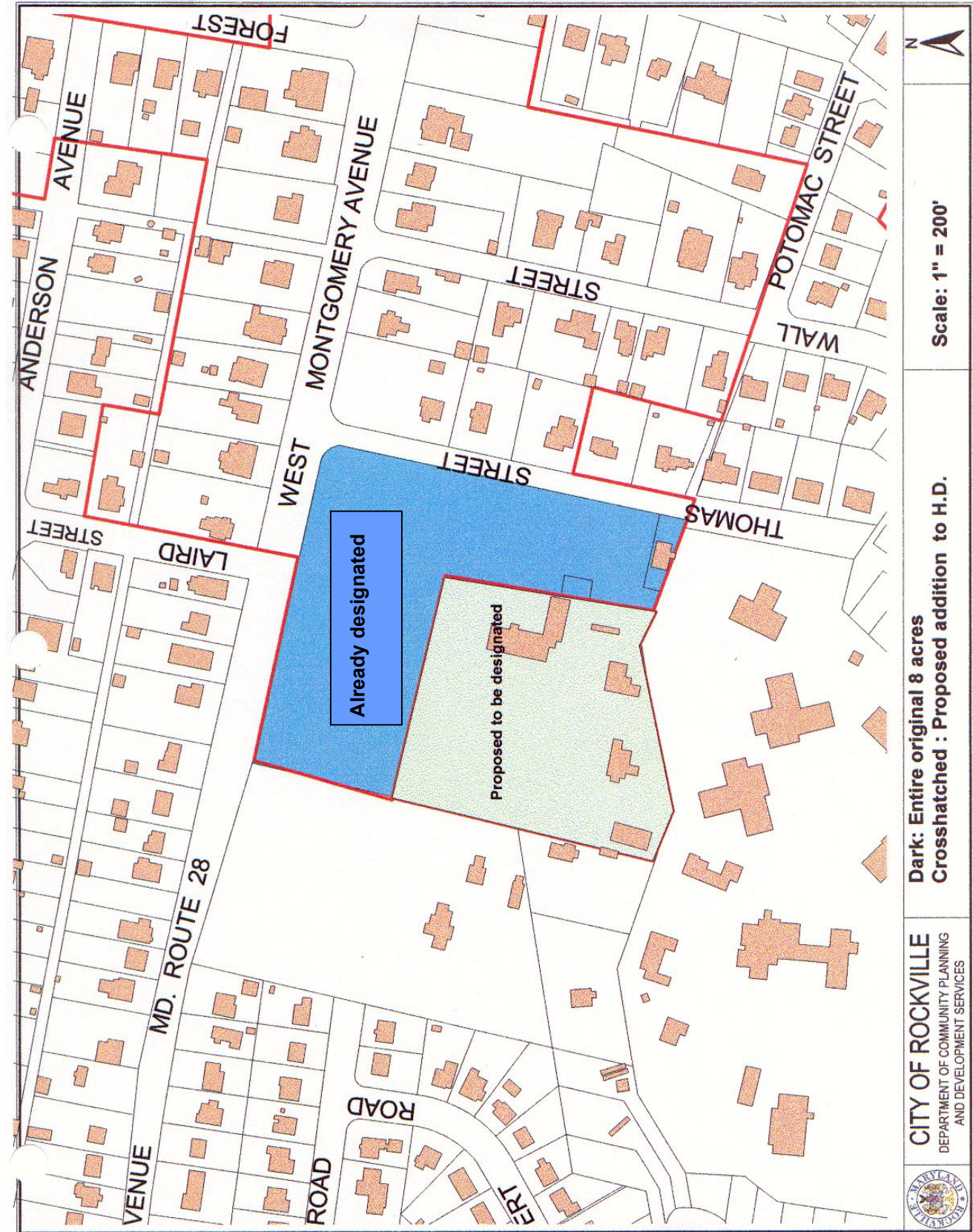
Staff recommends that the remaining undesignated portion of the five-acre Woodlawn Hotel lot as now listed in the National Register district be brought into the locally designated historic district. This will prevent undue delays when future development plans are proposed. Since the property is listed in the City's inventory of historic resources and included as part of a National Register listing, the Historic District Commission would review any substantial changes or demolitions on the property. If the Historic District Commission found that the proposed changes or demolition would have an adverse impact on the historic significance of the site, review and approval of the changes would be the responsibility of the Maryland Historical Trust, or the HDC could commence the process to bring the remainder of the site into the local historic district. Either method would take approximately six months. Therefore, staff recommends that proceeding with the local historic designation at this time would result in a faster review process for the Washington-Waldorf School. It also provides clear direction about the City's preservation priorities for consideration by the school in the preparation of their plans for development and reuse of the property.

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Attachments

1. Site Map.
2. History of Chestnut Lodge Historic District zoning.
3. History of Chestnut Lodge

ATTACHMENT A: SITE LOCATION



ATTACHMENT B: Chestnut Lodge Historic District Designation History

The procedure for designation of historic districts was crafted in 1973. Text amendment #T-112-73, which permitted sectional rezoning, was introduced on November 20, 1973 and adopted by the Mayor and Council on December 10, 1973 as Ordinance #40-73. This ordinance required the Planning Commission to initiate sectional map amendments. At that same meeting, the Mayor and Council requested that the Planning Commission file appropriate rezoning applications for historic districts. After public hearings in February and March of 1974, the Mayor and Council of Rockville adopted Sectional Map Amendments M-241-74 and M-242-74 to create three historic districts in Rockville on April 8, 1974. The West Montgomery Avenue district included the front 8 acres of the Woodlawn Hotel/ Chestnut Lodge property, all of the Rockville Academy property, and several other sites that were subsequently removed when the district lines were redrawn during a comprehensive rezoning on December 16, 1974.

The action taken at the December 16, 1974, meeting (meeting #61-74, p 381 ff) was a comprehensive rezoning addendum to the 1970 Master Plan. The wording is vague when it addresses the Chestnut Lodge property beginning on p. 385.

"Regarding the Chestnut Lodge or Bullard property, Councilman Freeland suggested that the property be removed from the district except for a buffer strip the length of the property, parallel to Montgomery Ave., the width of 100 feet from the right-of-way of Montgomery Ave. Councilman Haight asked that the width be 200 ft. to provide natural screening for the building."

"Discussion followed. Councilman Buchanan was opposed. He said the building was one of the most significant in the City but the present owners cannot be expected or required to take care of the building forever and said, "the building should remain in the Historic District."

"Councilman Freeland said the Bullard people would take care of the property in or out of a historic district and people can't really see it anyway as it is too well screened."

"Councilman Buchanan said if it were to be replaced, you would soon find out how many people noticed it and that is what the historic district is about. To quote: (It is about) " Preserving the nature and the identity of the environment. It isn't a question of how well people keep up there (sic) property, but what would happen if that property fell into the hands of those people who would not keep it up. That is why you have a preservation society."

"Councilman Porter agreed with Buchanan. The minutes quote him saying, "There would be an opportunity there to build something major in an R-S zone. He felt the structure itself is worthy of attempting to maintain."

"Councilman Buchanan said there should be consistency, just as was shown in working with the Academy people. "

"Councilman Haight said the council should be realistic. This is a working business. The building for that purpose is at the end of its life. Putting the Bullard property in the Historic District is risking the whole ball game. If it were attacked on a constitutional basis, it would fall."

"Mayor Hanna said it was a perfect case for the buffer zone. To quote: "his thought was to remove it from the Historic District and put it in a buffer zone. He suggested that 200 feet be left in the district..."

"All but Buchanan were in favor of the 200 foot proposal. "

Chestnut Lodge Historic Designation

Page 3

"Ordinance No. 42-47 says that the "pending ordinance be amended to reflect the decisions just made in the following respect:

1. Delete Section 7-204 (e)
2. Amend Sect. 2-302 (f) to read as follows; The Chairman of the Commission shall be appointed by the Mayor, subject to confirmation by the Council, from one its appointed members to serve for a term of one year. No person shall succeed himself as Chairman.
3. Change #9 No. Adams Street, Lots 77A and 77B from R-90 to O-2.
4. Rockville Academy Building, Lots 14, 15, and one-third of Lot 16, to half depth, will remain in the Historic District. The remainder of the property will be removed from the Historic District.
5. Bullard Property, 'Chestnut Lodge', remove from Historic District, with the exception of a 200 ft. strip, measured from the Montgomery Ave., right-of-way, extending the length of the property, parallel to Montgomery Ave.

Adopted unanimously. "

The difficulty in interpreting this is the vague reference in the minutes to the "Bullard Property, Chestnut Lodge." The property history shows that the Woodlawn Hotel Lot was at first only five acres. Subsequently, Mrs. Colley, the hotel developer, purchased the recorded but undeveloped Veirs lots along Thomas Street, which added three acres. When it was advertised for sale in 1908, it was described as a hotel, stable, carriage house, laundry, servant's quarters, and "eight beautiful acres." By 1974, the Bullard family owned all of Rose Hill as well. So this reference to the "Bullard Property" is not very helpful. However, the discussion in the minutes deals mostly with the hotel building that was erected on the original five-acre site. It is presumed here that the five-acre parcel is the subject "Bullard Property, 'Chestnut Lodge'" referenced in the minutes of December 1974.

The Historic Preservation planning element addendum to the 1970 Master Plan was adopted by Resolution no. 5-82 in 1982. The adopted Historic District zoning map shows all the Veirs Subdivision lots along the west side of Thomas Street remaining in the historic district as well as the first 200 feet of the five-acre hotel lot. Planning staff persons Margaret Hall and Lisa Rother are firm in their opinion that unless there is a direct contraindication, the adopted zoning maps have the force of law. From this evidence, it is clear that the Veirs lots along Thomas Street remained in the district, and the first 200 feet of the original five-acre Woodlawn Hotel lot were included in the district due to the decision of the Mayor and Council on December 10, 1974. These are the West Montgomery Historic District boundary lines on the current 2002 zoning map.

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